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SPEECH AND LIP-READING
FOR THE DEAF.

A TEACHER'S TESTIMONY

TO THE

“GERMAN” SYSTEM.

A PAPER

WRITTEN FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS AT MILAN,
SEPTEMBER, 1880,

BY

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SPEECH AND LIP-READING FOR THE DEAF.

To bring before an assembly like the present one any contribution to its Proceedings which shall be of real practical value, it is necessary that one should speak only of what he knows, what he has seen with his own eyes, or has actually accomplished with his own labours. Within these limits I hope to restrict myself.

Before I come to speak of the experience gained during that service to the Deaf which has absorbed two-thirds of my whole life, it may be expected that I should say something on a subject to which I am known to have given some attention—the Statistics of Deafness. (See *Special Question 5*, end of Programme.)

I wish I had anything new to tell you, on this head. But the present time is most inopportune. The numbering of the people of Great Britain and Ireland occurs decennially, in the first year of every decade. The last enumeration took place nine years ago; the next will take place a few months hence. Not till 1851 was any “Census of the Deaf and Dumb” ever taken in Great Britain at all. Since then it has been made at ten-year intervals; and the fourth such Census is to be taken in the spring of the

ensuing year. In the meantime, whatever may be our opinions and our apprehensions, neither "those who hope the best nor those who fear the worst" (into which two classes a great English author [Swift] said the whole human race might be divided) can obtain any adequate or justificatory evidence to sanction conclusions differing from those based on the Census Returns of 1871, until the Returns of 1881 are published. These will be of inestimable value. The significance of the declared total will be of relatively small importance in comparison with the value of that additional factor in the computation which will enable us to estimate together the several Returns of 1851, 1861, 1871 and 1881.

Still, we shall not get as much help as we desire from the British Census, because it deals only with the totals. This, however, is not the case with Ireland. There, the figures are supplemented by special details, with an unstinted and admirable copiousness which makes us wish that the same kind and amount of information were equally obtainable from accredited official documents in other countries. Yet it is possible to blunder, even there. That, of course, goes without telling; for the country is Ireland. But how readily the error is detected first and corrected afterwards I will show you by a singular example. In one district of the country the number of children returned as "dumb" was so excessive and improbable that further inquiry was made, through the verifying agency employed,—the Constabulary of the

country,—when it was discovered that the rural enumerator had put down as “dumb” every infant who was too young, not only to speak but, to perform any other act of volition whatever.

Still, even scanty information, when it can be depended upon, is better than doubtful estimates and guess work. A comparison of mere totals will tell us a good deal ; and the record of another ten years’ progress in the life of a great nation, in respect of its deaf population, will, when contrasted with those of ten, twenty, thirty years before, give us abundant matter for reflection and enquiry.

What are the changes which occur ? Is the direction of their action uniform or contradictory ? What are the causes which produce them ? Are they constant or variable ?—subject to influences within human control, or altogether independent of it ? These are questions which must occur, and which have occurred, to the minds of those who, duly impressed with the sense of its profound importance, have given their serious attention to the facts and figures which bear upon this subject.

We already possess considerable knowledge of the most fruitful causes of deafness, both congenital and post-natal. How far are we succeeding in arresting the action and effect of those causes ? As regards consanguineous marriages, and intermarriages among the deaf—is the knowledge of what unions ought to be avoided, and the prudence which avoids them, extending ? or not ?

Then, as to diseases which result in deafness. Are they becoming more amenable to medical treatment? Or, is their subjugation to more highly developed skill, even yet, only limited and partial? Have we stopped them short at the point where they would destroy life, only to leave them still more rampant with the malignity which destroys hearing? In a word, Have we fewer *dead*, but more *deaf*? And is this inevitable? Can we hope to push back the invader further still, to a limit where he shall have no power over either life or hearing? Then, indeed, will science, and the skill which is its offspring, have achieved for humanity a noble victory. But, if the first result of improved medical treatment is, though but temporarily, to save life at the expense of hearing, and, while diminishing the general death-rate, to add to the number of the deaf,—the applicants for admission into our institutions will not diminish, nor will the necessity for their instruction, on the best systems and with the utmost possible advantages, call less loudly for public benevolence and support.

Reviewing the whole subject, we are justified in concluding that some causes may be modified, that some will disappear—(as “spotted” fever has done in the United States),—that some will vary at different periods,—like meningitis, for example, which has been so prevalent as to have become the subject of a special inquiry among the medical men of Germany,*—and

* See a Paper read at the Paris Congress, September, 1878, by M. Hugentobler.

that the spread of sounder knowledge of the Laws of Health and Disease will tend to diminish the number of the Deaf, as was found when the British Census of 1871 was compared with that of 1861. But against all this we must set one fact of growing magnitude and significance. The deaf are now led, as a consequence of existing customs and of the circumstances of their education, to associate together in after life, and to mate with each other in an increased and increasing degree. From this we cannot but anticipate that those possible—I was going to say, but as we now know them to be, the actual and certain—consequences of such unions will affect in a very marked manner all future enumerations.

On this ground then, amongst many others, I advocate that system of teaching and training the deaf which separates, not congregates, them ; which promotes small schools, not large ones ; the employment of hearing teachers, not deaf ones ; of teachers trained and highly competent, not unqualified and inefficient ; which gives the pupil the speech of his country, not the “signs” of his class ; and which, finally, sends him out into the world, confident and well-instructed, to find his duties and companions there, — not a system which leaves so many of them, timid and ill-instructed, to turn back and associate with others like themselves.

Here it may be said—for it has been said—that for me to lay down and maintain such a position as this is highly inconsistent. Well, gentlemen, it is

really hardly worth spending the little time it occupies to answer such an objection, ever so briefly. The question is not whether the speaker is inconsistent, but whether his testimony is true. The man who can most securely plume himself upon his consistency (if nothing more) is he who learns nothing, but remains fixed and immoveable from first to last. Those, on the contrary, who are ever learning, and constantly applying their additional acquirements to practical ends, are often open to the cheap and ready charge of inconsistency; but they have their compensation, for it is to such as they that the human race has often owed its greatest obligations.

Besides, there are those present who can testify that I never was the direct opponent of the "German" system. I always believed and said that Speech for the Deaf was the best thing conceivable. Placed, however, as I was, I had to work for the best thing attainable, yet never shutting my eyes to the superior end, and only waiting for the proof that it was possible. That proof I have received. I have seen the possible accomplished. The ideal of my conceptions and my hopes is realized in successful "German" teaching, and in that alone. I see that the deaf, taught upon any other system, are *both* deaf and dumb; taught upon this system, they are *not* "deaf-and-dumb." And you who hear these words know, better than anyone, the infinite world of difference which is involved in this distinction.

And now, with your permission, I desire to address myself to some of the questions proposed in the official programme which accompanied the invitation to this Congress.

My opportunities of observation have exceeded those of most of my countrymen: but I will not unduly trespass upon your time, as many of the questions have received special answers from those with whom I have the honour to be associated.

PROGRAMME.

SECTION I. QUESTIONS 1—3.

Answer:—The whole of the first series of questions is governed by the enquiry,—“Should a school be a boarding or a day school”? (Question I.) As I think that teaching should be by speech and not by signs, it follows, that contact with those who speak should be assiduously promoted, and association with the deaf as earnestly and systematically discouraged. Schools should, therefore, be small; assimilated in all respects to the manner, tone, and spirit of a school for hearing children. The pupil’s mind is like a ball which, wherever it rolls or wherever it falls, comes into contact with *something*. Let that “something” be—hearing influences; habitual association with those who speak; who are always speaking. In

large boarding schools of the deaf and dumb, the contact is with the deaf alone. The healthy elevating process just described is completely reversed: and this procedure is as much to be deprecated as the former is to be promoted, with a watchfulness which never tires, and a perseverance which never flags.

SECTION II. ON TEACHING. QUESTION 2.

Answer:—No definite answer is possible. I said at the Conference in London, in 1877, “As soon as a child can learn *anything* it should learn *something*.” (*Proceedings*, page 16.) This is the principle—“a rough and ready principle,” it has been called—which applies to *all* teaching, irrespective of system or of class. But the different degrees of health, development and capacity, found in children of the same age, prevent its formal reduction to any fixed rule. Some children are more capable of receiving instruction at three years of age than other children are at the age of six. Only—and this is most important—let the education be, from the first, of the best kind, and on the best principle. It would be better to give little instruction, or even none at all, than such as must be *unlearned* when the pupil goes to school. Every teacher of experience can testify that this work of up-rooting that which should never have been allowed to grow, is the most harassing, most difficult, and most disheartening of his tasks.

SECTION II. QUESTION 7.

Answer :—The pupils should change masters, but the masters should also change classes, from time to time. Teachers should not remain always with pupils who are on precisely the same level as their predecessors. Nothing so thoroughly breaks down that elastic spirit which is the life of all good teaching as enforced detention at one and the same grade. Neither body nor mind can be maintained at its full stature, if either nurses or teachers are constantly *stooping*, to adapt themselves to the stature, physical or mental, of the children in their charge.

SECTION II. QUESTIONS 8, 9.

Answer :—It is of the most vital importance, to keep the minds of our deaf pupils interested and their attention alive, to avoid weariness of their lessons. To this end I would adopt little changes, frequently, but of course judiciously. Let the children change their postures and positions; let the class-room itself be changed, occasionally, and the teacher also. The lessons and amusements will naturally change.

SECTION III. ON METHODS. QUESTION 7.

Answer :—Art teaching is useful in this respect (*i.e.*, in the sense of the previous answer), but it should always be in due subordination to the proper purpose of education, which is not to make good artists, but to train good citizens.

SECTION III. QUESTION 1.

Answer :—To what I have already said in this paper I desire to add that “ Signs ” are not a language, though they are sometimes said to be one. They are but a substitute for language, and a bad substitute. They are also said to be a means to an end, but are too often acquiesced in and adopted as the end itself. They do not open the door to the world of written and spoken language ; they turn the key inside, and the poor mute soul is confined within its own small intellectual world—for life.

SECTION III. QUESTION 2.

Answer :—In the “ Pure Oral ” method—which, in this paper is always spoken of as the “ German ” system—speech is the first and chief means employed. In the “ Mixed ” system it is only one amongst others. But, let this never be forgotten, to degrade it is to kill it.

SECTION III. QUESTION 8.

Answer :—The surer and, in the end, the more extensive “ knowledge ” is to be obtained on “ the method of articulation,” because such knowledge is acquired through language, the infallible and always available means to further acquirement. It follows that the time so spent is *best* spent, however long it may be.

SECTION IV. SPECIAL QUESTION 2.

Answer :—After this result,—a full knowledge of language—has been attained, and not until then, there is not only no reason why a deaf pupil should not go to an ordinary tutor for instruction in classics or other higher branches of learning, but it is the proper, and the only proper, course to be adopted. I have known cases in which it has been adopted, without difficulty, and with marked success.

A sentiment of the late Sir Arthur Helps,* primarily applied by him to philanthropic action in another direction, appears to me to be peculiarly appropriate to education, and especially to the education of the deaf. “Human nature,” he says, “is a thing to which we can put no limits, and which requires to be treated with unbounded hopefulness.”

No wiser maxim for our guidance was ever penned than that. Approach the Deaf in that spirit—teach *them* in that spirit, and they will rise up to thank you, their benefactors, in accents like your own. But it is only this spirit of “unbounded hopefulness,” kindred to the “faith which can remove mountains”

* *Friends in Council*, vol. ii. p. 328.

of difficulty, which can accomplish such a task. Yet see what notable achievements it has already made ! It is in this same spirit of “unbounded hopefulness” that Discovery and Skill have made their most important conquests. They have promoted the commerce of the world by shortening tedious routes, and removing obstacles to navigation as old as the creation. Surely there is, here, an analogy most instructive to ourselves. When I began my work as a teacher of the deaf, every Eastern voyager went to India round the Cape. Waghorn had not tracked the overland route ; de Lesseps had not cut through the Isthmus, and joined the Western to the Eastern seas. A parallel change has taken place in the work we are considering, so far as my own and some other countries are concerned. I began to teach on the “Sign” system. I “went round the Cape.” There was no Suez Canal then. There is now. And by that superior route I mean to go, as I most strenuously and earnestly urge its adoption upon you. It goes straight to its destined port. Other systems stop short of it. And it is our duty—our solemn bounden duty—to the deaf children whose needs have called this remarkable assembly together, and to Him who is the God and Father of us all, that we should do the best we can, by the best means which are available, and with the best efforts which we can command. To do this is not only to follow at our humble distance in the blessed steps of our Great Exemplar, “Who went about doing good” to the deaf who were brought to Him for sympathy and help,

but it is also to help forward the fulfilment, in one of its lesser meanings of the prayer which He Himself has taught us—"Thy kingdom come."

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